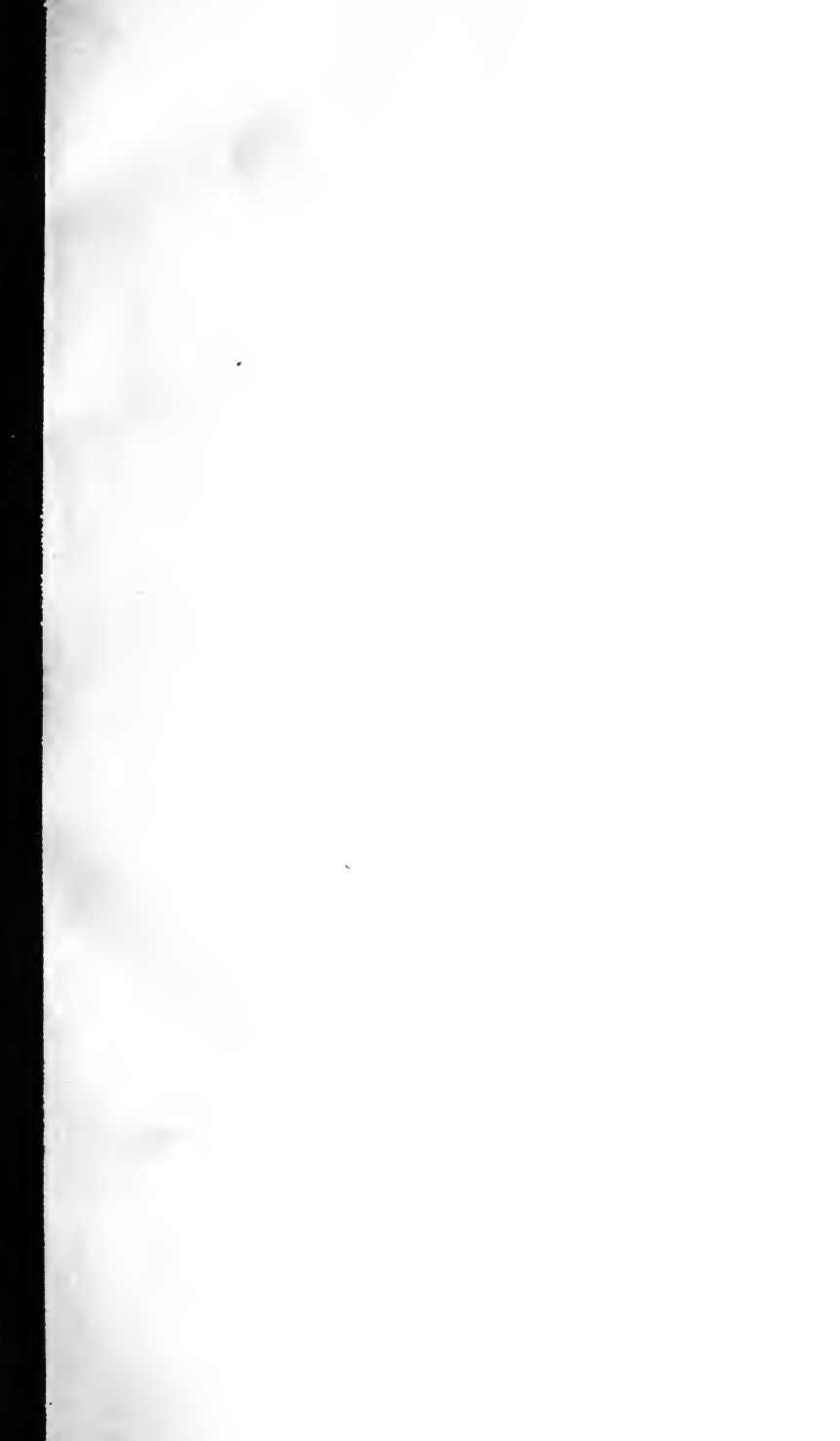


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Fraser, Charles G.

The anti-examination
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The Anti-Examination Craze

BY CHAS. G. FRASER

ASSISTANT MASTER, GLADSTONE AVE. SCHOOL,
TORONTO.

From *Canadian Teacher*, September 15, 1900.



One of the vexed educational questions of the day is that regarding examinations; and when we consider the lack of judgment that is shown by those who set the questions, the haste and injustice of some of those who value the answers, the undue importance that the general public attaches to the results, and the dishonest acts resorted to not only by the pupils but also by even teachers, that they may appear well before the public, we cannot wonder that some should propose to do away with examinations and should organize a crusade against them. They decry them because some fail who in their opinion should pass; and some who pass, in their opinion should fail; because the questions are ambiguous, too difficult, off the limit or unfairly valued; because the answers are hastily and carelessly marked; because it provokes a rivalry between schools and among pupils; because of the

boasting and unfair comparisons which follow; because they encourage overwork and cramming; because they trammel teachers and compel them to teach what they do not feel inclined to take up and so render teaching a drudgery; and because the political party in power, which is responsible for the conducting of the examination, is not of their way of thinking. But when we consider the place that examinations must occupy in a perfect educational system and their great value in all educational work we do wonder at the premises laid down by these apostles, the arguments they advance and the conclusions at which they arrive!

A perfect educational system provides for the development of each child into an adult who can, and will, fill his place in society; who is able to think quickly, decide correctly and act promptly in the various emergencies of life; who is willing to be dependent upon others but anxious to be helpful to all, who will strive to excel in all good works; who is able to express his thoughts so that others may comprehend his meaning fully, and whose various faculties are so developed as to enable him to know and appreciate the pleasures and privileges of life which fall to his lot and so fulfil the highest purpose in life by doing his duty to himself, his neighbor and his God. And any educational system is defective in so far as it falls short in making such provision and any educator fails in so far as he neglects

any of these objects or fails in attaining them.

An education is a progression, each day continuing yesterday's building and preparing for to-morrow's superstructure. One by one the various faculties of the child are brought into activity. The true educator recognizes these faculties as they reveal themselves and by exercise he develops them. The work of the first class in school should be those subjects which will employ those faculties the child actively possesses at that period of his life. and also the first steps in those subjects which will enable him to acquire information for himself and be helpful to him in the process of his development. He must be trained to apply himself to what is necessary as well as what is agreeable and to be thorough in all that he does, gaining information and developing power. The work of the first grade prepares him for that of the next class and is necessary to successful work in it whether under the same teacher or under another.

When the interests of many are involved, as in the public schools, system is necessary and the individual is merged into the group. The work for each grade is carefully chosen and definitely stated, sufficient to employ the time well and adapted to the capacity of the child but difficult enough to demand effort on his part. It is necessary for the child to master this work fairly thoroughly before attempting the work of the next grade. Some children mature much earlier in life than

others and also develop much more rapidly. These should not be subjected to a process of suppression. It may be permissible to clip the hedge to secure uniformity ; but, in life, the child should be treated as an individual and trimmed merely to add to his own moral, intellectual or physical beauty and fruitfulness.

If the teacher employs proper methods to direct the pupil and stimulate him to exert himself, the average pupil will be well up in his work and ready to proceed with the work of the next grade at the specified time. Day by day, she employs her power of questioning to test the work done in the past, the correctness of the opinions formed, to rouse the child to greater mental activity, to lead him to form conclusions and seek for information for himself. When she pronounces him ready to take up the work of the next grade there must be some fair test to decide whether her judgment is correct or not ; for if he is not ready, his promotion will be an injury to himself, a drag to his class and a burden to his new teacher. The teacher may be qualified to judge, but by a desire to please the boy or his parents, to appear to succeed, or to be relieved from unpleasant duties her judgment may be biased. If the child remained under the charge of the same teacher the hasty promotion would cure itself ; but when the promotion means a shifting of a burden to another, the chances of such dangerous measures must be carefully provid-

ed against. Is it reasonable then to demand a fair test to decide whether he knows his work and can perform certain operations in a satisfactory manner? And what can take the place, for this purpose, of a fair examination, correctly conducted?

To be fair, this final promotion examination must have certain essentials. The questions must be confined to the work definitely laid down in the curriculum, and yet cover it. The language should be simple and the questions stated plainly, so that no doubt need exist in the mind of the average pupil as to the meaning; and, while not so easy as to be a farce, must not be beyond the power of the average child of that age or grade. The paper should not be too long for the time, nor the time too long for the endurance of the average child. It should be a fair effort to let the pupil show that he has mastered the work, the style of his answers indicating the excellence of the work; and the result should be considered in connection with the examination standing of the pupil during the term.

The questions should not be set by the teacher or by any other single person. He might run in a rut; he might be too severe or too lenient; he might not confine the questions to the limit; he might not cover the work, or he might be unfortunate in the language he uses. To provide against all these, it is well to associate three or more in the preparing of the questions, particularly when the interests of

many are involved, as in the Entrance Examination; and it is necessary that each member of that committee see, and carefully criticize, each word, expression and question on every paper. Fear of hurting the feelings of his co-examiner must not be considered. He has a duty to perform to the authorities that appointed him or the body by which he was elected, as well as to the pupils whose interests are involved. This will provide against such examples of bad judgment, carelessness, ignorance or malice as are to be found year by year in one or more papers of the Entrance set. Who was to blame for the ignorance or carelessness of the person who set the paper in Physiology and Temperance in 1899, who did not know the limits laid down on that subject for "Entrance" and "Leaving" classes, or was so careless as to interchange them? And who was to blame for the lack of judgment shown by the person who set the Dictation paper for this year, not only in the words selected, but also in the method of arranging them?

Finally, the answers in these promotion examinations should be valued by the teacher of the class, who, day by day, is dealing with minds of this maturity, and can be trusted to know how full an answer should be expected. She will be sufficiently interested in the results to read the answers carefully and sufficiently impartial to value the answers justly. If not, she should be dismissed promptly, as her life

is corrupting the young lives who are day by day associating with such a moral leper.

Final promotion examinations conducted under these conditions would be of great benefit, both to pupils and teachers and would in no way do an injury or an injustice to either.

1. They would stimulate the pupils to greater effort and more definite work.

2. They would correct the superficial indefiniteness that is so common now.

3. They would show pupils that they cannot waste their time with impunity and that the mere spurt at the final cannot succeed.

4. They would be a miniature of life where we have years of training or preparation for the moment of trial which results in victory or defeat.

5. They would nerve them to meet difficulties and overcome obstacles.

6. They would train them to do more than merely what is pleasant.

7. They would train them to be honest, thorough, quick and self-dependent.

8. They would be a fair test and an honorable reward.

9. They would engender a healthy rivalry and a praiseworthy determination to excel.

10. They would train the victor to wear his laurels without ostentation and the vanquished to bear defeat with grace.

11. They would be a miniature of the strug-

gles of real life where one gets the prize but each gets the true reward.

12. In all these ways they would make the work of the teacher easier, more pleasant, more systematic and more thorough.

13. They would also be some guide to the teacher in the work of the class.

14. They would be an independent standard to correct or support her decisions.

15. The results would be a partial recognition of the excellence of her work. It would not, perhaps, be a direct test of her most important work—character-building—but it would require many of the qualities of a successful character to meet and overcome such a difficulty and would suggest the last great examination when the books will be opened.

With such advantages can not examinations be conducted so as to be depended upon? Should they be abolished? Why not abolish questioning also? If abolished on certain subjects will those subjects not be neglected? Are teachers the only class of individuals who "would rather bear those ills that be" than by opposing end them? If that is the spirit that reigns in our schoolroom what hope have we of manly boys and virtuous girls in the rising generation?

THE ANTI-EXAMINATION CRAZE.

By CHAS. G. FRASER, Assistant Master, Gladstone Avenue
School, Toronto,

From *Canadian Teacher*, November 1, 1900.

The editorial in THE CANADIAN TEACHER of the 1st October, in reference to our article contained in the issue of the 15th September, contains so many general statements which are in accord with the present dangerous American desire for liberty, which has degenerated into looseness and even license, and also so many statements which are at variance with the true conditions, that a reply will not be out of place.

We are at a loss to see the great difference between "teaching tests" and examinations. Why should the former be considered so correct, so "necessary a part of all good instruction," as to be dismissed with the bare statement that they are not opposed, while examinations, particularly promotion examinations and especially final promotion examinations, are said to be the cause of so much evil? In fact, they are accused of being the cause of nearly all the ills of the school-room—shackling the teacher, over-stringing nervous tempera-

ments, rendering school work a drudgery, preventing broad and progressive work, demanding uniformity, eliminating the personal element, degrading the pupils to mere machines, encouraging "cram," parading the pupil and the teacher, and encouraging them to greatest effort under a constant dread of failure.

Wherein lies the great difference between a "teaching test" and an examination? Is not a teaching test a set of questions? So is an examination. Are not the questions of the teaching test asked on work taken up in the class, or on thoughts relating to that work? So are examination questions. Are not the questions of the teaching tests asked by one who is supposed to know the subject under discussion? The examinations are also. Are the questions of these tests definite, and intelligible to the pupil? They must be at an examination too. Must not the pupils put their answers in writing? That is exactly what is expected at an examination. Must not the answers to these teaching tests be clear, and show that the pupil knows what he is writing about? That would be quite satisfactory at an examination. Must not the answers to these teaching tests, which are "so necessary as part of all good instruction," be read, valued, and marked, and must not a record thereof be kept? That is exactly what is done at an examination. And, lastly, would not the writer of this editorial expect the

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teacher to base his recommendation for promotion to the next class, or to the next lesson, which is essentially the same, on the results of these most necessary "teaching tests"? Of course he would; and that is the very way we would utilize the examinations, the final promotion examinations, which he considers so baneful. But our suggestion was that *both* the term examinations and the final examinations be considered in the matter of promotion. Wherein exists that great difference the editorial claims there is? It exists only in the mind of the writer, unless we wish to refer to excellent "teaching tests" and to inferior and unfair examinations, or "as they are generally conducted."

Do not these "teaching tests" demand uniformity in the pupils? So do examinations; but not to the extent the writer would pretend. How can they destroy the individuality of the pupil or degrade him to a mere machine? To ask the pupils of a class to consider the same questions has no greater tendency to weaken their individuality than to ask the class to view and discuss the same beautiful landscape, to listen to the same charming narrative, to read the same interesting book or to attend the same course of instructions. The individuality of the pupils will merely be developed by all these forms of activity. Their views will be broadened and their faculties strengthened, not only by the seeing, the listening, or the reading, but also by the forming

of an opinion and the expressing of their views. It is inactivity, and that only, which saps the powers and narrows the individuality of the child.

Do these "teaching tests" prevent broad and progressive teaching? Do they admit of to-day's lessons being a continuation of yesterday's work, of being the link connecting the work of the yesterdays with that of the days that are to come? Of course they do. And these tests will stimulate the pupil to more definite work, more accurate work, more continued work, and more desirable work, than could be secured without them. And if the final examination be what it should be, and what we outlined in our former article, it will be a twin sister to this school device, called "teaching tests." The examination will *be* a teaching test. And does anyone say there are not enough men and women in the teaching profession to prepare such examinations? Surely that would be a slap sufficiently hard to arouse even the teaching profession, of which it has been said that "suffrage is the badge of all their tribe." Let us meet each difficulty as it presents itself, and, making a stepping-stone of each, let us climb to clearer airs and broader views—let us "point to heaven and lead the way."

Again, does the thought that he is to be tested stimulate the pupil to closer attention? So does the thought of a fair examination; and this closer application does not weaken

any of his faculties, does not hinder his development nor detract from his pleasure. The thought of a fair "teaching test" does not stand like a ghost across his pathway and cause him to worry while the lesson is being taught, or while he is carrying on some little research on his own account. It does not paralyze his efforts nor overstring his nerves. And we can say just as confidently that the thought of a fair final examination would not in the least mar the pleasure or weaken the profit of any lesson worthy of the name—a lesson which shows preparation, arouses interest, demands thought and secures co-operation. Think of either pupils or teacher, under these conditions, being haunted by the nightmare of failure! The very idea is ridiculous.

But does this ghost really haunt some schoolrooms? Or is it to the writer of that editorial, the ghost of Banquo which will not down, and which causes his lips to pale and his knees to quake? Has he, like some we know, climbed to the position he now occupies by means of examination results, promotion examinations, departmental examinations, and even competitive examinations; and now having nothing more to expect from the source does he wish to part company, to decry the bridge which brought him safely across to the land of fame? Does he wish even to destroy the bridge, so as to make his position secure from attack, or to prevent others from getting

across ? To such persons the thought of examinations with all their possible results, are certainly very objectionable and are liable to cause the work of the teacher and the class to be drudgery and mere "grind." But this class of teacher is not the rule ; it is the exception.

We could imagine other schoolrooms where the dread of failure has an abiding place—where the teacher has not a definite grasp of the work of the class, where the lessons are taken up without definite preparation, where the subjects discussed are merely haphazard topics, and where the result of the work is only a mass of confusion. This dread of failure will also dwell where the class, or many members of it, are promoted before they are prepared, and there being too much work to do the result will appear forbidding. But it never exists where the promotion has been fair and the teacher is industrious, intelligent and methodical—where he has his work well in hand and progressively works towards that ideal. Which of these conditions prevail ? The answer to this question must have an important influence in leading us to a right conclusion regarding examinations.

This "dread of failure" often seizes certain pupils towards the end of the term and they appear to work with feverish anxiety. They have perhaps been promoted from class to class, before they were ready, on the time and age basis, or on the strength and influence of

their parents in the community, with all the disastrous results which are so sure to follow. They have perhaps paid little or no attention to the lessons ; they have spent their evenings on the street insulting people as they pass by ; they have been gadding the street long after the home doors should have been locked. Their strength has been sapped and their nerves injured by parties, dainty fare, late hours, as well as lack of application ; and now the day for promotion draws on, and the examinations, or the dread of them, is blamed for their serious condition. Are these the exception or the rule ? If the exception, they should not control the school. If the rule, how long will this condition of affairs continue ?

Much has been said against uniformity, but to a certain extent each member of a community must surrender part of his individual tastes. He must consider his rights only in connection with the rights of others. He must consider the interests of the community at large, must obey the same laws, dress in the usual way, attend the same classes, and hear the same lessons. Certain subjects must be compulsory. We must learn to read intelligently, to write legibly, to add rapidly ; to know our own land and its relation to others ; to know our privileges as citizens and the steps by which we have climbed to our present condition ; to know ourselves and the care which will husband our strength and multiply our happiness. Will this weaken our individuality ? The

associations in the schoolroom will be merely a stimulus to him, unless the class is too large and the progress impeded by certain ones who are not prepared to take up the work. It is perhaps here, in our present graded system, that we find the greatest hindrances to the development of the individual child.

Lastly, why should we object to any fair test of our work? It is said that, with the exception of the saloon, every occupation is anxious to exhibit its finished product and subject it to every test the public knows. The one who objects is at once branded as an inferior workman; and whether pupils and teachers pass in review before the public, each year by examination or not, they are certainly held up to the public gaze, and their work is closely criticized, and not always to their advantage. The frequent change of teachers makes the development of the pupil anything but a unit; and the lack of definiteness and progression in the work of many of our teachers, one-fourth of whom are raw apprentices, makes them but poorly qualified to give either a teaching test or to set a good examination paper. If we would put any confidence in the opinions so commonly expressed by business men, our boys and girls "know nothing about everything." There is a carelessness, a looseness, an indifference about them, which is lamentable. The "pliant plan of grading" is certainly here, and the time and age promotion play a most disastrous rôle, to the injury

of both pupil and teacher. This editorial pleads for no definite ideal. Let every man be a law unto himself. How long would it be before we would drop to Calibans, and have "sundown, Saturday night and pay day" as the goals of life.

THE ANTI-EXAMINATION CRAZE.

ARTICLE III.—REPLY TO INSPECTOR HUGHES.

By CHAS. G. FRASER, Assistant Master, Gladstone Avenue School, Toronto.

The reply to our first article on "The Anti-Examination Craze," which appeared in THE CANADIAN TEACHER of November 1, from the pen of Inspector Hughes, is to us a great disappointment. We would expect more from Mr. Hughes. He is an educationist whose reputation is international, a speaker who is warmly welcomed to all educational councils from east to west of our great continent, an author whose works are read with pleasure, and whose opinions are listened to with deference, by educators of every rank. He is a man who stands as one of the foremost exponents of "the new education" in which men are supposed to have equal rights, where reason holds a just balance to weigh any argument which may be advanced so as to arrive at the absolute truth, and where individuality

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is held sacred. In short, Inspector Hughes is a modern man whom we would expect to acquit himself as a royal knight when he enters the lists in defence of what he considers to be the truth, even though his opponent be the humblest and most obscure knight of the vast army of educators.

We would expect a soldier of such weight would have no difficulty in maintaining his cause and overthrowing his puny adversary without needing to resort to the measures he has employed. We would not expect him to put up a man of straw and strike him down, to select isolated phrases, to misinterpret words, or to look for support to such weakness as President Loudon's address, an address which was noticed merely because of the position the speaker, by chance, occupied in our "machine" educational institution. We would think he would have as great an advantage over his opponent as Goliath held when he advanced with shield and sword and armor-bearer against the shepherd lad whose only weapons were a sling and a few smooth stones. And when we come to think of it, Mr. Hughes uses the same argument—ridicule.

Some time ago, while speaking of the many flattering reviews which had appeared in the public press regarding a most excellent work, Mr. Hughes remarked that few of the writers showed any evidence of having read the book intelligently, not to speak of having caught the spirit of the work. In like manner, Mr.

Hughes' review shows little evidence of his having read our first article, and much less of his having interpreted the spirit. He has placed a meaning on "craze" which modern usage will not sustain; and, instead of referring to examinations as we proposed conducting them, he has discussed examinations as he has conducted them in the past, or as he has known others to conduct them. He has overlooked our paragraph of objections to examinations as they have been conducted, as well as our course of argument leading up to the conclusion that examinations were necessary. This new point would reverse the tables and "pour contempt" upon the funny (?) additions which he proposes, the ridiculously improbable darkey story he relates, the Scottish conservatism he ridicules and the "narrow vision" he deplores, to say nothing of the strong arguments which he neglects to advance.

It is true that from the bosom of the plain our vision is limited except towards the great firmament. But it is also true that those who climb the mountain-side are at times so surrounded by clouds as to have a range still narrower. It is said that from a certain peak in the Alps, the name we cannot for the moment recall, at a certain period of the day a monster spectre appears to the bold climber and promptly repeats his every movement. For a long time this was a cause for alarm; but now it is known to be but the shadow of the beholder. These facts suggest that educational

climbers also may at times be subject to influences which weaken their judgment and render their opinions worthless. The English hunters, who, wishing to make sport of the Highland shepherd, remarked to him that he could surely see to America, were surprised when Sandy declared he could see farther "as" that—he could see to the moon. So it may be possible that some of us who tread the common sod have a wider vision than some of the more favored ones ever imagined and are able to recognize the moonshine which from time to time falls into our modern educational circles.

This is a day of educational "fads." Every new proposal finds its warm supporters, who proclaim their theory a "revelation," a "progressive evolution." Many of these theories prove to be mere "fads"; they run their little course and pass away. Other proposals, though having good features, are carried to extremes and prove an injury. We are as anxious as anyone to acquaint ourselves thoroughly with every new movement and to adopt any and every means which will make the work of the school-room more pleasant and more effective, every means that will assist in the great work of character-building, that will prepare our boys to quit themselves like men in the battle of life, that will assist our girls to attain the highest ideal of life, which is true womanhood. But we are not too ready to cast aside the old and tried methods for every new proposal which may be made. The farmer's lad who gained

two dollars by selling the bell on the most beautiful cow, did so at the loss of the cow, and when it was too late repented for having forsaken an old and well-tried custom for immediate gain. And we fear that some of the proposals of "the new education" would result in the loss of the child or in his failure to attain his highest and best development. "No cross no crown" and other adages of our forefathers are held up to ridicule. "Knowledge is power" belongs to the past. Examinations are said to be "excruciations"; but we believe that to do away with examinations, promotion examinations, and even competitive examinations—one and all—would be at the expense of the child.

One of Mr. Hughes' strongest contentions in the past is that one does not know what he cannot express. Some persons, like Mr. Hughes, are able to express their thoughts forcibly and effectively on the public platform; others, like ourselves, have to resort to *writing*, because practice in public speaking has been denied us and we have not acquired that coveted and most valuable gift called oratory. One means or the other is necessary. The latter method is the commoner and, perhaps, the lower gift, but in the expression of thought, whether by speaking or by writing, practice is the price of perfection; and we are at a loss to know what "legitimate educational agency" Mr. Hughes could suggest to take the place of examinations, to produce the

desired result or to give the necessary practice? And in what way are examinations, as we proposed conducting them, illegitimate? What weakness arises from the consideration of questions asked by others? Are examinations not miniatures of the struggles of life? What successful effort is there in life which does not cost weeks and even months of preparation? And the sooner our boys are led to recognize this point the sooner they will be placed on the first rung of the ladder to success.

“ The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.”

In our first article are enumerated the objections which we urged against examinations as they are now conducted, and our claims that examinations were essential in a perfect educational system. We outlined our ideal of an education and dealt with the daily progress not only in the separate subjects, but in the order in which the child's faculties are called into activity. We showed the necessity for system in public school work where the interests of so many are united. We gave our reasons for having a test for promotion and the desirability of that test coming from a competent and impartial source. We outlined a plan for conducting an examination—the questions, who should set them, and who

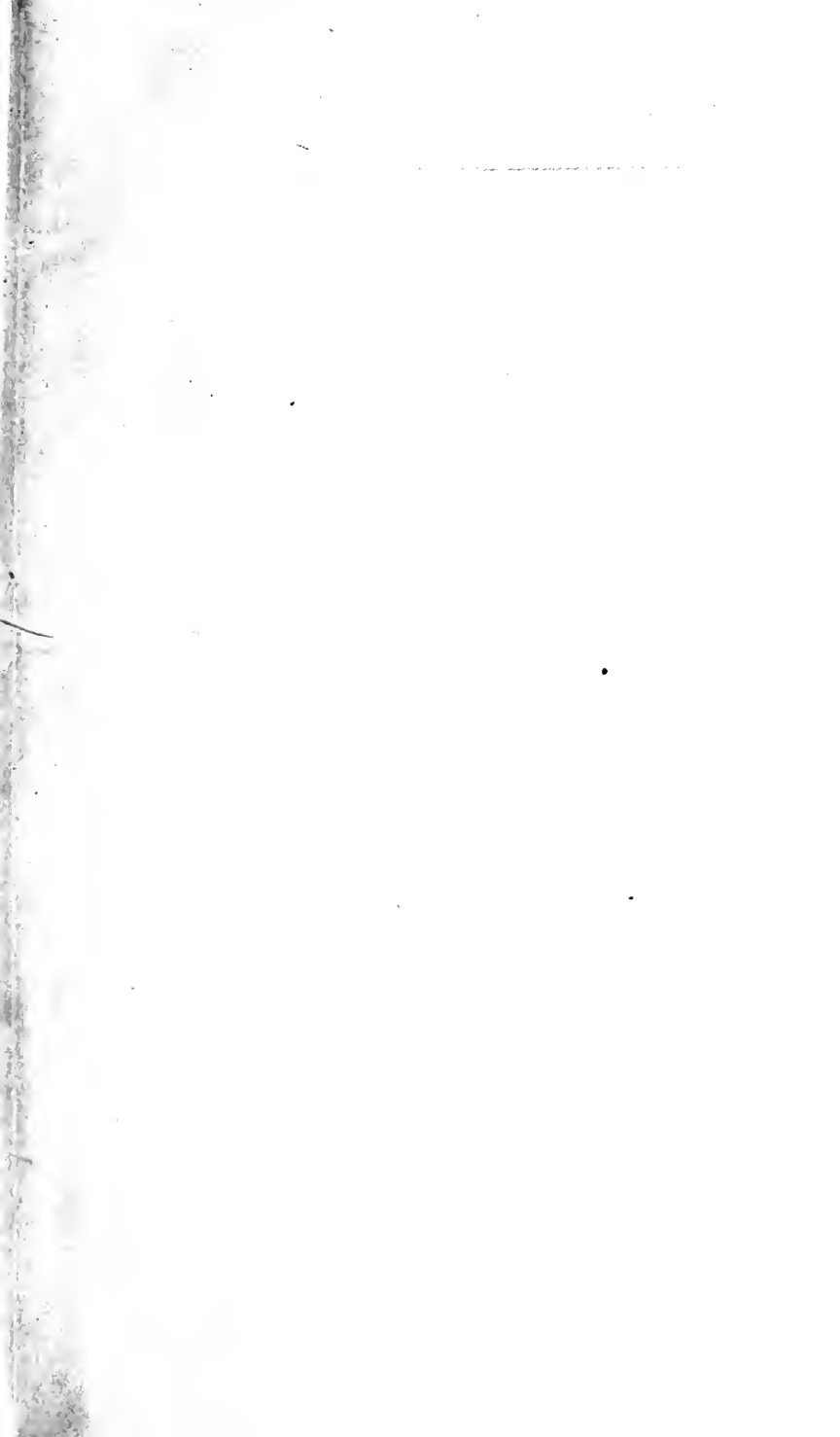
should value the answers—and ended with stating the results we considered would flow from such a method, which included the preparation as well as the promotion.

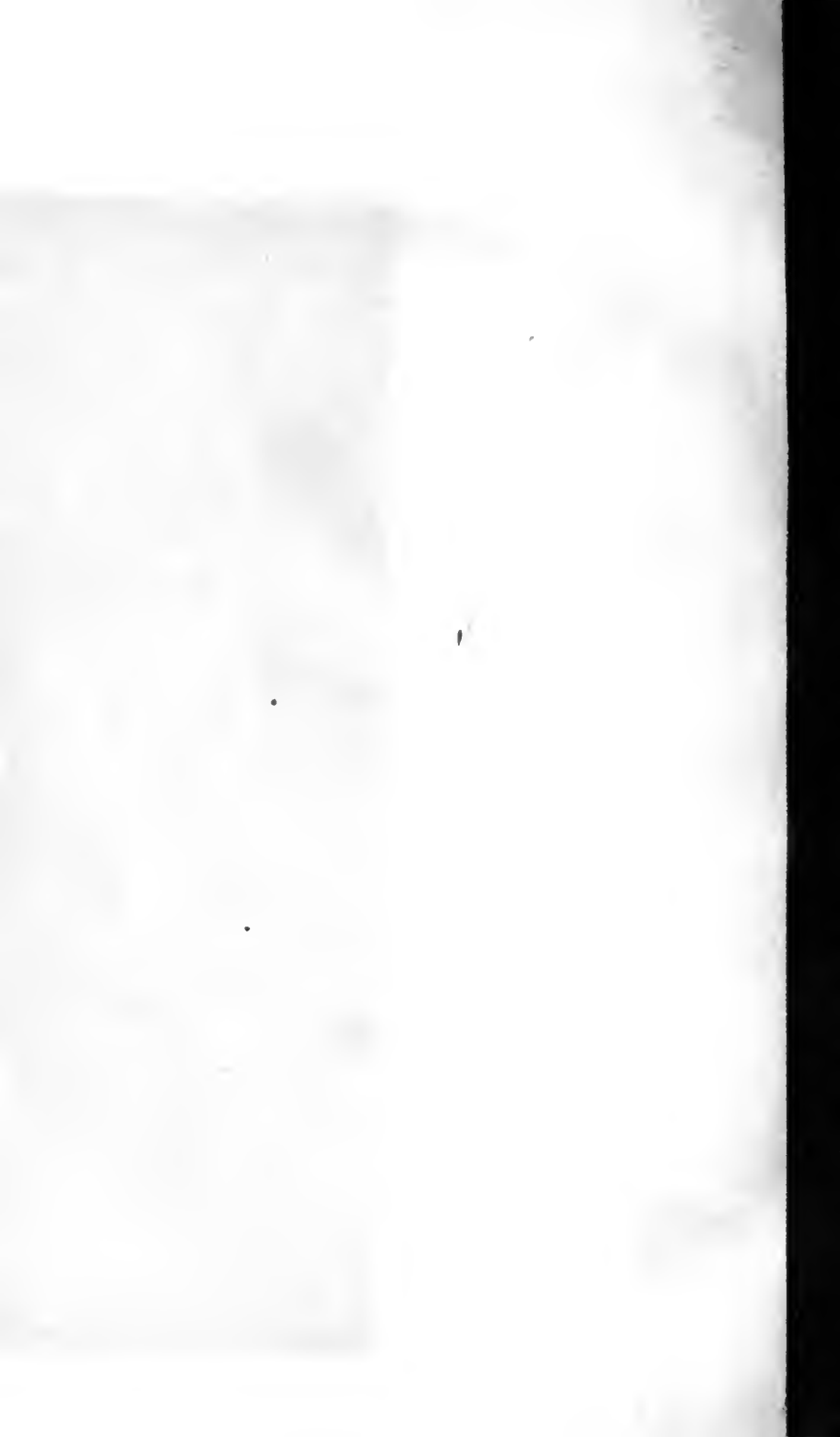
Is our ideal of an education low? Can any of the followers—or the leaders—of “the new education” suggest a higher? Does our conception of the progression of school work indicate a limited vision? Do our reasons for system suggest a lack of experience? Does not our proposal to ask the teacher to value the answers show our confidence in the honesty of the great majority of the noble army to which we belong? The treatment of that point by Mr. Hughes is unworthy of so honorable a debater, and haste must be his excuse. Does he who lives in the inner and upper circle of modern society not know that more than kissing goes by favor? Has there not come under his notice instances of persons in higher positions than the teacher’s—if there be such—of persons in independent positions, who have been forced to do and say things which are not in accord with their true opinions? The statement may be unpleasant—may be “monstrous”—but it is true; and we are prepared to show that examinations are not the only school agencies which tempt pupils and teachers to dishonesty.

What fault can be found with the method proposed for conducting examinations? Is the ideal low, false, or impracticable? Where has it been tried and found wanting? Many

of the methods of "the new education" have a tendency the opposite of what we claimed would be the result of the proposal, and which we hoped would counteract some of the influences now at work. Wherein lies the "humor"? Where does the "audacity" and the "vastness" of the imagination appear? The editorial in THE CANADIAN TEACHER admits that teaching tests are a necessary part of all good instruction, and we think our second article showed conclusively that the examination and the teaching test are identical, that examinations are reasonable, and that they stimulate the pupil and make him more methodical and definite without destroying his individuality.

Articles like Mr. Hughes' criticism can be dashed off in a few moments—and may be answered as quickly. In fact, they require to be answered only on account of the high source from which they spring, for what institutions *of repute* are forsaking examinations for admission or for graduation, in Canada, United States or Great Britain? Russia, France or Brazil are not lands to hold up as ideals to us. It would be as logical to do away with examinations because they tempt some to be dishonest as it would be to propose possessing no valuables—no coins or curios—because they tempted those burglars who took our choicest.





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Author Fraser, Charles G.

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